

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #2209/01 2040934
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 230934Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5662
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0076
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2867
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2977
RHMFIS/COMUSKOREA CC SEOUL KOR
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR
RHMFIS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002209

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO COMUSKOREA SCJS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2017

TAGS: PREL PTER PGOV MARR AF KS

SUBJECT: ROK DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSES HOSTAGE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: CDA Bill Stanton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) In a July 23 meeting with the CDA, ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Shim Yoon-joe expressed ROKG appreciation for USG cooperation and information sharing in handling the Taliban kidnapping of Korean civilians in Afghanistan. In particular, Shim said that the ROKG appreciated USG assurances that no military rescue operation would be launched without prior consultations.

REITERATING THE KOREAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL

¶2. (C) Shim also explained why, in response to the kidnappers' demands, the ROKG had decided to reiterate its intention to withdraw ROK troops from Afghanistan by year-end. (NOTE: At the end of last year, the ROK National Assembly had directed that the ROK military contingent in Afghanistan be completely withdrawn by the end of this year. END NOTE.) Although it had been a "tough decision to make," Shim said the ROKG had decided that the reiteration of the plan could help secure the safety of the ROK citizens, especially since the troop withdrawal in any case had already been decided and communicated to the USG and Government of Afghanistan. If, however, the ROKG had not publicly reiterated the intention to withdraw and ROK hostages were killed, it would have had a negative impact on maintaining ROK forces in Afghanistan until the end of 2007 and could have also affected ROKG consideration of contributing to a PRT. Shim hinted that preempting the negative impact of potential casualties and showing that MOFAT was doing all it could to secure the safe return of the hostages might leave open the possibility that the ROK could contribute to a PRT in Afghanistan at some point.

TALIBAN DEMANDS

¶3. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Shim told CDA that the ROKG had received no formal demands from the Taliban militants, but that Afghan "local elders," (2 local assemblymen and 8 tribal leaders), had been in discussions with the Taliban since Sunday, July 22. The hostage takers were said to be from the "Abdul Group," and the Government of Afghanistan was

tracing the activities of this group and watching the group and its leader. The latest word from the Government of Afghanistan was that the hostages were safe, despite some rumors to the contrary. Shim said that he appreciated the quick USG efforts to help discredit the false rumors. (NOTE: With the assistance of Op Center, Embassy Kabul and USFK, Embassy was in contact with MOFAT throughout the weekend clarifying reported events taking place in Afghanistan and dispelling rumors. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C) Shim said the ROKG had received through various channels unofficial demands for: (1) the withdrawal of ROKG troops; (2) the release of Taliban prisoners; and (3) a commitment that no military rescue operations would be launched. There had also been rumors of possible demands for ransom, but these rumors had not been verified. Shin reiterated that the ROKG had already planned to withdraw ROK troops by year-end and that this plan was well understood by the USG and the Government of Afghanistan. As for Taliban prisoner releases, the ROKG view was that this was beyond the ROKG's control. Shim said that the ROKG had only asked the Government of Afghanistan to "cooperate for the swift and safe return" of the hostages, and had not elaborated on what this might entail. Finally, Shim said that the ROKG had already asked the USG and Government of Afghanistan not to conduct military rescue operations without prior ROKG consultations.

NEXT STEPS

¶5. (C) Shim explained that the ROKG had dispatched to Afghanistan Vice Foreign Minister Cho Jung-pyo, who had arrived on Sunday, July 22, Afghan local time. Cho had met with Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Vice Minister of Internal Affairs, the head of the National Department for Security, and Ambassador Wood. In addition, the ROKG was consulting closely with the Government of Afghanistan. Shim said that Afghanistan had established an inter-Agency task force on the hostage issue and that the ROK Ambassador to Afghanistan was participating in the task force meetings. The ROKG would also send a five-person military delegation to Afghanistan to help with local coordination and information gathering. Shim said that the ROKG expected to hear the Taliban's official demands later on July 23. Once the "elders" received a "demand list," they would present it to the Afghanistan taskforce, which would consult with the ROKG.
STANTON